

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 05296 130736Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9639
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T BEIRUT 5296

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI PINS PINT LE IS SY
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH GREEK
ORTHODOX BISHOP GHOFRI SALEEBY

1. GREEK ORTHODOX BISHOP GHOFRI SALEEBY, WHO IS ACTING AS
LOCUM TENENS UNTIL QUESTION OF SUCCESSION TO LATE ARCHBISHOP
SALEEBY IS SETTLED, CALLED ON ME SEPTEMBER 11 TO EXPRESS
HIS CONCERN ABOUT SITUATION IN BEIRUT. HE SAID THAT OF
ORIGINAL 6,000 OR SO GREEK ORTHODOX FAMILIES LIVING IN ASHRA-
FIYAH, 2,500 HAD FLED AND 3,500 REMAINED AND WERE STICKING
IT OUT. THOSE WHO HAD LEFT HAD FOR THE MOST PART GONE TO
THE MOUNTAINS WHERE THEY HAD HOUSES OR RELATIVES. VERY FEW
OF THEM ("SOME HUNDREDS") WERE STAYING IN CONVENTS OR SCHOOLS.
OF THE 15,000 TO 16,000 MARONITE RESIDENTS OF THE QUARTER,

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PERHAPS 80 PCT. HAD LEFT.

2. HE SAID ORTHODOX COMMUNITY WAS FINDING ITS CIRCUMSTANCES
INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT WITH ECONOMIC STAGNATION SETTING IN
BECAUSE OF DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION. PEOPLE OF
RESPECTABLE FAMILIES WHO HAD BEEN IN COMFORTABLE CIRCUM-
STANCES WERE COMING TO HIM ASKING FOR MONEY WITH WHICH TO

BUY BREAD. ORTHODOX CHURCH HAD VERY LITTLE IN THE WAY OF INCOME AT PRESENT BUT HAD SUBSTANTIAL EXPENSES IN CONNECTION WITH ORTHODOX HOSPITAL, WHICH WAS RUNNING AT A MONTHLY DEFICIT OF 300,000 TO 400,000 POUNDS. THEY WERE DIPPING INTO SAVINGS TO KEEP IT GOING BUT SOON THEY WOULD HAVE TO CUT INTO HOSPITAL PERSONNEL.

3. HE SAID MARONITE MILITIAS WERE CONTINUING A FORWARD POLICY VIS-A-VIS SYRIANS AND WERE STRENGTHENING DEFENCES THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER, PUTTING UP HIGH (I AM TOLD SIX METERS) SANDBAG BARRICADES IN CERTAIN AREAS. IN THE SASSINE CIRCLE AREA THEY WERE KNOCKING HOLES IN THE CONNECTING WALLS OF ADJOINING BUILDINGS SO THEY COULD MOVE ABOUT WITHOUT GOING OUT ON THE STREETS.

4. HE HAD HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH BACHIR AND PIERRE GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN WHICH LEFT HIM GREATLY CONCERNED AS TO THEIR INTENTIONS. BACHIR'S FOLLOWERS WERE CALLING HIM "YOUR EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT" AND SALEEBY SHARED VIEW THAT BACHIR WAS TRYING TO PROVOKE LARGER SCALE FIGHTING WITH IDEA OF BRINGING ABOUT TOTAL COLLAPSE OF STATE AND CREATION OF NEW ORDER WHICH WOULD BE RUN BY HIM. SALEEBY SAID THAT HERETOFORE HE HAD THOUGHT PIERRE GEMAYEL WAS NOT INVOLVED IN BACHIR'S SCHEME, BUT HE WAS BEGINNING TO DOUBT EVEN THIS. HE HAD TOLD THE GEMAYELS AND THE CHAMOUNS THAT THEIR TACTICS WERE THREATENING THE SURVIVAL OF THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY AND THEY
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HAD SHRUGGED IT OFF. PIERRE GEMAYEL HAD EXPLAINED THE MARONITES ARE FIGHTING FOR THE SALVATION OF LEBANON. HE EVIDENTLY DID NOT CARE WHAT HAPPENED TO ORTHODOX.

5. SALEEBY SAID THE ORTHODOX DID NOT WANT TO FIGHT AND NEITHER DID MANY OF THE MARONITES. THE GEMAYELS AND THE CHAMOUNS WERE LEADING A MINORITY OF EXTREMISTS. HE ASKED IF WE COULD NOT PREVENT THE FLOW OF ARMS POURING IN FROM ISRAEL TO THE MARONITES. I SAID OUR INFORMATION INDICATED THAT THERE WAS A MODERATE FLOW OF LIGHT ARMS COMING IN BUT THAT THE KATAIB AND AHRAR HAD ENOUGH ARMS AND AMMUNITION TO FIGHT WHETHER OR NOT THE ISRAELIS SENT THEM MORE.

6. SALEEBY SAID THAT UNFORTUNATELY THE OTHER ARABS WERE UNABLE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE MARONITES AND THE REST OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. LEBANON WAS SURVIVING TODAY ON REMITTANCES SENT BY LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WORKING IN THE GULF AND SAUDI ARABIA AND MANY OF THEM WERE ORTHODOX. HE FEARED THAT AS THINGS GOT WORSE THE ARAB GOVERNMENTS WOULD DECIDE TO KICK OUT ALL THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS, ORTHODOX AS WELL AS MARONITES.

7. COMMENT: SALEEBY WAS JUST ONE MORE IN AN INCREASING
NUMBER OF VOICES OF DESPAIR WHICH WE HAVE BEEN HEARING IN
RECENT WEEKS.
PARKER

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NNN

Message Attributes

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